

# Hepatitis A

## ❑ WHAT IS IT?

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes infection of the liver.

## ❑ SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Symptoms usually begin 2 to 6 weeks after exposure to the virus. The duration of illness varies; most people recover within 3 weeks. Hepatitis A infection is more severe with age, and in rare circumstances, can cause severe complications and liver failure.
- ✓ In adults, early symptoms include nausea (upset stomach), loss of appetite, vomiting, fatigue, fever, and abdominal cramps (stomach or side pain).
- ✓ Dark yellow or brown urine, pale or white-colored stools (bowel movements), and jaundice (yellow eyes or skin) may also be present but do not occur in all cases.
- ✓ Persons can have all or only a few of these symptoms.
- ✓ Young children who are infected with hepatitis A may have only a mild flu-like illness without jaundice, or may have no symptoms.

## ❑ HOW IS HEPATITIS A SPREAD?

- ✓ The virus lives in the liver and is passed in the stool.
- ✓ The virus enters another person when hands, food, or objects contaminated with stool are put in the mouth. The amount of contamination needed to spread the infection is very small and is not visible to the eye.
- ✓ Spread occurs when an infected person does not thoroughly wash his/her hands after going to the bathroom.
- ✓ Hepatitis A can be spread through drinking water or eating shellfish contaminated with the virus.
- ✓ Hepatitis A can also be spread through sexual activity if hands or mouth come in contact with stool or parts of the body contaminated with stool.
- ✓ A person is most contagious during the 2 weeks before the illness symptoms begin.
- ✓ Hepatitis A is not spread by kissing, sneezing, or by saliva.

## ❑ DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

- ✓ Hepatitis A is diagnosed with a blood test called the hepatitis A IgM test.
- ✓ Rest, a low fat diet, and plenty of fluids are recommended. Avoid drugs and alcohol.

## ❑ PREVENTION

- ✓ Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running, warm water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food.
- ✓ Keep bathrooms clean and supplied with soap and clean towels.
- ✓ Change diapers on surfaces that can be cleaned and sanitized after every use.
- ✓ Never change diapers on eating or food preparation surfaces.
- ✓ Cook shellfish thoroughly before eating.
- ✓ Drink water from approved sources only. Adequate chlorination of water as recommended in the United States will inactivate HAV. Boiling or cooking food and beverage items for at least 1 minute to 185° F (85° C) also inactivates HAV.
- ✓ Hepatitis A vaccine provides protection against hepatitis A for many years. The vaccination series consists of 2 doses that are given at least 6 months apart.

## ❑ WHO SHOULD GET HEPATITIS A VACCINE?

- ✓ All King County children 1-18 years of age. Gay and bisexual men.
- ✓ Drug users (injection and non-injection). International travelers where hepatitis A is common (includes all areas of the world except Canada, Western Europe & Scandinavia, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia).
- ✓ Persons with chronic liver disease, including chronic hepatitis B and hepatitis C.
- ✓ Persons with clotting factor disorders, such as hemophiliacs.
- ✓ Anyone else who wants protection against hepatitis A.

## **❑ WHAT IS IMMUNE GLOBULIN (IG)?**

- ✓ Immune globulin (IG) is a blood plasma product that can prevent hepatitis A if given within 14 days of exposure to an infected individual. IG is effective 80-90% of the time.
- ✓ IG is necessary if the exposed person has not been vaccinated against hepatitis A and has never had a hepatitis A infection.
- ✓ Immune globulin provides protection against hepatitis A for about 3 months; vaccine is needed for long-term protection.
- ✓ Immune globulin may be recommended for you if you:
  - Live with someone who has hepatitis A.
  - Have eaten food or put objects in your mouth handled by a person infected with hepatitis A.
  - Have had sexual or other intimate contact with a person who has hepatitis A.
  - Are traveling to an area where hepatitis A is common (see above list).
  - Are a child attending, or an employee of a child care program in which another child or employee has hepatitis A.

## **❑ CHILD CARE AND FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS**

- ✓ Please notify Public Health immediately at (206) 296 – 4774 whenever a food handler, childcare worker, or child attending a childcare develops hepatitis A infection.